DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 409 PS 021 750

AUTHOR Orrell, Joan K.

TITLE A Situational Approach to Assessing Parenting Competency.

PUB DATE Mar 93

NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (60th, New Orleans, LA, March 25-28, 1993).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Child Rearing; Classification; *Discipline; *Elementary School Students; Grade 1; Interpersonal Competence; *Mothers; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parenting Skills; Primary Education

IDENTIFIERS *Disciplinary Styles; Parent Effectiveness; Parenting Styles; Teacher Rating of Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

A 25-item taxonomy of problematic situations that commonly occur between mothers and their 6- to 8-year-old children was developed and evaluated systematically. Seven situation types emerged from a combined empirical and rational analysis. The taxonomy was then administered to 93 mothers who were asked how they would respond in each situation, and what they thought would be the short- and long-term behavioral outcomes of their disciplinary behavior. The children's classroom teachers assessed the degree to which the children experienced difficulty in peer interactions. A paradoxical effect was found. Mothers' use of coercive strategies was often as effective as non-coercive strategies in achieving child compliance in the short term. However, in the long-term, mothers' use of coercion was correlated with child noncompliance and with teacher-rated child social maladjustment. This dual finding contributes to an understanding of why mothers might perpetuate certain incompetent parenting practices. The taxonomic instrument developed and validated here may prove useful in future research on parenting and in clinical use. (Author/MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 363 409

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

A SITUATIONAL APPROACH TO ASSESSING PARENTING COMPETENCY

JOAN K. ORRELL
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN

Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society of Research in Child Development, New Orleans, LA, March, 1993.

PS 021750

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joan K. Orrell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ABSTRACT

A 25-item taxonomy of problematic situations that commonly occur between mothers and their six-to-eight-year-old children was developed and evaluated systematically. Seven situation types emerged from a combined empirical and rational analysis. The taxonomy was then administered to 93 mothers who were asked how they would respond in each situation, as well as the short and long-term child behavioral outcomes of the mothers' disciplinary behavior. The children's classroom teachers assessed the degree to which these children experienced difficulty in peer interactions. A paradoxical effect was found: mothers' use of coercive strategies was often as effective as non-coercive strategies in achieving child compliance in the short-term. However, in the long-term, mothers' use of coercion was correlated with child noncompliance and with teacher-rated child social maladjustment. This dual finding contributes to our understanding of why mothers might perpetuate incompetent parenting practices. The taxonomic instrument developed and validated here may prove useful in future research on parenting and in clinical use.

INTRODUCTION

Intervention initiatives in response to the competence concept of psychopathology emphasize behavior modification through skills-training. However, skills-training intervention with parents has proceeded without systematic analysis of the problematic situations that occur between parents and children, and consequently without the tools necessary to identify and to assess empirically a parent's skill deficits in specific salient parent-child situations. Moreover, the skills-training approach has been applied without regard to the child's age or stage of development.

To be optimally effective, social skills intervention must be preceded by valid assessment procedures (McFall, 1982; McFall & Dodge, 1984). Goldfried and D'Zurilla (1969) offer the behavior-analytic model for the assessment of situation-specific skills competence. The behavior-analytic model emphasizes the assessment of skills in the context of specific problematic situations, that is situations in which there is "a low likelihood of 'automatic' effective action" (p.159). Such a situation would require a decision to act, the intention of which is to solve the problem.
Goldfried and D'Zurilla's behavior-analytic model (1969) calls for a comprehensive and detailed criterion analysis of the problematic social situations, and the possible behavioral responses to these situations, that occur for any given population. This criterion analysis is a pre-requisite to individual assessment and is comprised of three sequential steps: (1) situational analysis, (2) response enumeration, and (3) response evaluation. Once the assessment instrument is constructed, appropriate evaluation procedures are to be undertaken to establish the psychometric properties of the measure.

GOALS

(1) To develop a systematic scheme to assess parental competence across a representational set of relevant parenting situations.

(2) To test the hypothesis that parental competence, as assessed by this scheme, is predictive of children's peer group behavior and adjustment.

METHOD - PHASE I

This study proceeded in two phases. Phase I comprised the development of the taxonomy. Phase II consisted of the taxonomic classification and validation of the measure.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TAXONOMY

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS. An initial list of 318 problematic situations with which parents of six-to-eight-year-olds must cope effectively to be considered competent, and a separate list of parents' behavioral responses in these situations, were compiled based on information from the following sources: (1) the research literature; (2) a clinic sample; and (3) a non-clinical sample: Twenty mothers of six-to-eight-year-olds (11 girls, 9 boys).

Mothers recorded up to 15 actual problematic parent-child situations over a period a week. Mothers were also asked to: (1) describe their behavioral response to the situation; (2) rate the frequency of occurrence of that type of situation (1 = less than once a month to 5 = at least once a day); and (3) rate how much of a problem that

situation was for them (1 = not at all challenging to 5 = very challenging).
The final 25-item Taxonomy of Problematic Parent-Child Situations (version for parents of six-to-eight-year-olds) consisted of those situations rated as high in frequency of occurrence and situational challenge.

RESPONSE ENUMERATION. To determine efficacy in the criterion situations, a list of parental discipline strategies usually employed to manage these problematic situations was also compiled. Parental disciplinary strategies that were reported as having been used in these situations were comprised of the following: (1) ignoring, (2) inductive reasoning, (3) explanation, (4) negotiation, (5) withdrawal of privileges, (6) time-out, (7) scolding, (8) threatening, (9) shaming, and (10) physical punishment.

RESPONSE EVALUATION. This phase of the study was informed by previous research in the area of parental disciplinary styles and child outcomes as well as research in the area of child abuse and its consequences. Two major types of parental disciplinary strategies, generally referred to as "induction" (noncoercion) and "power assertion," (coercion) have emerged (Hoffman, 1977; Brody & Shaffer, 1982). Extrapolating from these empirical findings, a roughly hierarchical arrangement of the discipline strategies generated by parents in this study, based on level of implied coerciveness, was postulated. Discipline strategies that were defined to be subsumed within the rubric of "noncoercion" are ignoring, inductive reasoning, explanation, negotiation, withdrawal of privileges, and time-out. Scoldings, threats, shaming, and physical punishment were defined to be within the class of "coercion."

METHOD - PHASE II

TAXONOMIC CLASSIFICATION AND VALIDATION OF THE TAXONOMY

The next step was the administration of the taxonomy to a new sample of mothers in order to:
(1) classify empirically the 25 situations into fewer, more general task-oriented categories
(2) examine the correlation between parenting responses in these situations and child behavior in the peer context as assessed by teachers
(3) examine its utility as a research tool in the understanding of the relations among parent situational challenge, parent disciplinary style, child behavioral outcome, and frequency of occurrence of problematic parent-child situations.

SUBJECTS
A new sample of 93 first-grade children, their mothers, and their teachers participated in this phase of the study. Mothers were of low to lower-middle socioeconomic status. The children were 51 boys and 42 girls, 28% African-American and 72% White. The mean age of the children was 7.2 years.

PROCEDURES

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE ON CHILD SOCIAL COMPETENCE. For each child, teachers completed the Taxonomy of Problematic Social Situations for Children (TOPS), developed by Dodge and colleagues (1985) in the tradition of Goldfried and D'Zurilla's behavioral-analytic method (1969). Teachers rated each child on his or her competency in dealing with certain social tasks inherent in everyday peer interaction in the school setting. Factor analyses that have been conducted in order to classify the 44 items that comprise the TOPS into task-oriented categories, have yielded six factors that were taken to represent the tasks of peer competence: Peer Group Entry, Response to Peer Provocations, Response to Failure, Response to Success, Social Expectations, and Teacher Expectations. Because of the way the instrument is designed, high scores on the TOPS indicate greater difficulty with peer and other social situations in the school setting. Based on the factor configurations generated by Dodge, McClaskey, and Feldman (1985) for the Taxonomy of Problematic Social Situations for Children (TOPS), mean factor scores and a total mean score for each of the 93 children in this study were

calculated.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH MOTHERS. Following the presentation of each of the 25 situations that comprise the Taxonomy of Problematic Parent-Child Situations, the mother was asked:

(1) to rate her LEVEL OF UPSET when such a situation occurred (1 = non-reactive, neutral to 6 = very upset, angry)

(2) to describe her DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES in that situation (1 = ignoring, 2 = inductive reasoning, 3 = explaining, negotiating, 4 = withdrawal of privileges, time-out, 5 = scolding, shaming, threats, and 6 = physical punishment)

(3) to describe her CHILD'S TYPICAL BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE when she applies her usual parenting response, that is the SHORT-TERM child behavioral outcome (1 = behavior stops or improves, 2 = behavior continues or worsens)

(4) to rate the FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE of the specific child behavior that defines the problem situation, that is the LONG-TERM child behavioral outcome (1 = less than once a month to 5 = at least once a day)

(5) to rate the situational challenge, or how much of a parenting challenge the situation presents to the parent (1 = little or no challenge to 4 = very challenging).

RESULTS

FACTOR ANALYSES OF MOTHER REPORT OF SITUATIONAL CHALLENGE

Factor analyses were conducted, using the Taxonomy of Problematic Parent-Child Situations, for mothers' ratings on the dimension of situational challenge to parent. These analyses yielded a six-factor solution for which the eigenvalue for each factor was greater than 1. Items were sorted into the factor on which they had the highest loading, with the restriction that items be sorted only when the loading was greater than .30. The items subsumed within five of these six factors appeared to cohere rationally in terms of the situational tasks that each presented to the mother. However, the sixth factor was comprised of items that could be further rationally separated into two factors. This combined empirical and rational categorization of the 25 items resulted in the generation of seven factors (See Table 1) describing situations that typically present challenge to mothers in their interaction with their child.

INTERNAL CONSISTENCY OF FACTOR SCORES

Internal consistency, as assessed by Cronbach's coefficient alphas, was calculated for each of the seven factors (see Table 1). The alphas ranged from .57 to .86 (all $ps < .001$), and the alpha for the 25-item total score was .88. Whereas factors with fewer items were moderately internally consistent, factors with more items showed high internal consistency.

TABLE 1

THE TAXONOMY OF PROBLEMATIC PARENT-CHILD SITUATIONS: FACTORS AND COEFFICIENT ALPHAS

FACTOR (AND NO. OF ITEMS)		Alpha
1.	DIRECT DEFIANCE (7)	.86
2.	PASSIVE NONCOMPLIANCE (6)	.74
3.	PEER CONFLICT (2)	.58
4.	DELINQUENCY IN ASSIGNED SELF-CARE TASKS (3)	.62
5.	INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION-SEEKING (3)	.61
6.	INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO PARENT'S MATURITY DEMANDS (2)	.64
7.	VIOLATION OF SOCIAL MANNERS (2)	.57
	TOTAL ALPHA (25)	.89

All $ps < .001$.

CORRELATIONS

Mothers' scores on each dimension, across the 25 situations, were summed and averaged to create mean scores, indicating: (1) average level of coerciveness in disciplinary style; (2) overall frequency of occurrence of child problematic situations; and (3) mean level of challenge in parenting.

I.Mothers' average level of coerciveness in their disciplinary style and the overall frequency of occurrence of potentially conflictual parent child situations were significantly positively correlated,
$r = .79$, $p < .001$

II.Mothers who were more likely to use coercive discipline were also significantly more likely to describe these parent-child situations as challenging,
$r = .74$, $p < .001$

III.When mothers reported that problematic parent-child situations occurred frequently, they were also more likely to find them difficult to manage,
$r = .84$, $p < .001$.

MOTHERS' DISCIPLINARY STYLES AND
SHORT-TERM CHILD BEHAVIORAL OUTCOME

Chi-square analyses were conducted separately for each of the 25 situations to determine the relation between mothers' situation-specific discipline styles (dichotomously classified as non-coercive [explanation, inductive reasoning, withdrawal of privileges] or coercive [scolding, threatening, spanking]) and mothers' report of typical short-term child behavioral outcome (dichotomously classified according to whether the problematic child behavior stopped/improved or continued/worsened upon parental disciplinary intervention). Table 2 summarizes the results according to the seven factors and the situations that comprise these factors.

* The proportion of mothers who chose to use coercive discipline varies with the situation, from 5% to 78%.

* For none of the 25 situations was mothers' use of coercion significantly associated with more success in stopping child misbehavior.

* In 16 of the 25 situations, coercion was as effective a discipline strategy as noncoercion in dealing with the situation in the short-term.

* In nine situations, coercion was significantly less effective than noncoercion.

MOTHERS' DISCIPLINARY STYLES AND and
MOTHER-REPORTED LONG-TERM CHILD BEHAVIORAL OUTCOME

T-tests were performed to test the hypothesis that mothers who use coercive discipline strategies differ significantly from mothers who use non-coercive discipline strategies in their report of frequency of occurrence of problematic parent-child situations (See Table 2).

* In 23 of the 25 situations, mothers who reported that they dealt with problematic parent-child situations by using scolding, threats, and spanking, also reported significantly more frequent occurrence of such situations than mothers who reported dealing with such situations through explanation, inductive reasoning, or the withdrawal of privileges.

* Indeed, in 13 of the 16 situations in which mothers' use of coercion had been shown to be as effective as noncoercion in the short-term, it was also shown to be significantly less effective than noncoercion in the long-term.

TABLE 2

SHORT-TERM vs. LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF MOTHERS' USE OF COERCIVE DISCIPLINE

FACTOR (Situation)		% PARENTS USING COERCIVE DISCIPLINE	Chi-Square SHORT-TERM EFFECTIVENESS of COERCION vs. NONCOERCION (Behavior stop?)	T-test LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS of COERCION vs. NONCOERCION (Lower frequency?)
I.	**DIRECT DEFIANCE**			
i.	argues with parent	58%	No**	No**
ii.	swears or curses	39%	Yes	No*
iii.	refuses to do task	60%	Yes	No**
iv.	is deliberately non-cooperative	52%	No*	No**
v.	breaks house rule	51%	Yes	No**
vi.	rude or stubborn	59%	Yes	No**
vii.	school behavior problems	22%	No**	No**
	MEAN = 48.7%			
II.	**PASSIVE NONCOMPLIANCE**			
i.	ignores parent's instructions	46%	No**	No**
ii.	does not follow directions	20%	No*	No**
iii.	interrupts parent	30%	Yes	No**
iv.	dawdles at task	40%	Yes	No**
v.	knows but does not use good manners	25%	Yes	No**
vi.	watches too much TV	07%	Yes	Yes
	MEAN = 29.5%			
III.	**PEER CONFLICT**			
i.	refuses to share with peer/sibling	13%	No*	No**
ii.	verbal/physical conflict	33%	No*	No*
	MEAN = 23.0%			
IV.	**DELINQUENCY IN ASSIGNED SELF-CARE TASKS**			
i.	sleep issues e.g. avoidance	78%	Yes	No*
ii.	does not clean teeth/body	38%	No*	No**
iii.	does not pick up after self	60%	Yes	No*
	MEAN = 58.7%			
V.	**INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION-SEEKING**			
i.	whines instead of asking nicely (home)	32%	No**	No**
ii.	persistent whining in public places	41%	Yes	Yes
iii.	antics (climbing, noise) for attention	25%	Yes	No*
	MEAN = 32.7%			
VI.	**INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO PARENT'S MATURITY DEMANDS**			
i.	complains about chores	55%	Yes	No**
ii.	must be reminded to do chores	29%	Yes	No**
	MEAN = 42.0%			
VII.	**VIOLATION OF SOCIAL MANNERS**			
i.	plays at mealtime	16%	Yes	Yes
ii.	poor table manners	05%	Yes	No**
	MEAN = 10.5%			

Note: "No" = ineffective i.e., coercion significantly less effective than non-coercion
"Yes" = effective i.e., coercion and non-coercion did not differ significantly
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MOTHERS' SITUATIONAL CHALLENGE AND CHILDREN'S COMPETENCE IN PEER SITUATIONS

Mothers' mean factor scores on the degree of challenge experienced in the 25 situations of the parenting competency measure, the Taxonomy of Problematic Parent-Child Situations, and their children's mean factor scores on the peer competency measure, the Taxonomy of Problematic Social Situations for Children, were computed by summing and averaging the scores across the situations that make up each factor. Mothers' mean factor scores were correlated with their children's mean factor scores. As Table 3 shows, when mothers report situations as difficult for them to deal with, teachers report that those children experience difficulty in analogous peer situations. Mothers' total scores, that is a total mean challenge score across all factors, were significantly positively correlated with their children's total mean factor scores ($r = .44$, $p < .001$). Parental competency, as assessed by their report of situational challenge, predicted child competency in peer situations, as assessed by teachers.

TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MOTHERS' MEAN FACTOR SCORES (MOTHER SITUATIONAL CHALLENGE) AND CHILDREN'S MEAN FACTOR SCORES (CHILD SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT)

	Peer Entry	Peer Provocation	Response to Success	Response to Failure	Social Expectations	Teacher Expectations
Direct Defiance	.37**	.26*	.35**	.30*	.30*	.29*
Passive Noncom-pliance	.58**	.62**	.56**	.39**	.47**	.56**
Peer Conflict	.42**	.45**	.42**	.22	.30*	.36**
Delinquency in Assigned Self-Care Tasks		.24*	.26*	.28*	.20	.26*.31*
Inappropriate Attention-Seeking	.24*	.20	.22	.01	.05	.10
Inappropriate Response to Parent's Maturity Demands	.41**	.39**	.43**	.30*	.38**	.44**
Violation of Social Manners	-.17	-.22	-.16	-.18	-.21	-.22

*$p < .01$, **$p < .001$

MOTHERS' USE OF DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES AND OVERALL CHILD SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

The number of times each of the six disciplinary strategies was used by mothers across the 25 situations was computed. Each strategy was thus assigned a frequency score that was then correlated with the teachers' ratings of the children's overall social competence, that is the total mean score on the TOPS.

Children of mothers who reportedly used explanation, inductive reasoning, and withdrawal of privileges, were rated as experiencing significantly less social difficulty than the children of mothers who reported using scolding, shaming, threats, and spanking (See Table 4).

TABLE 4
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PARENTS' USE OF DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES AND TEACHERS' RATINGS OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT

Parents' Discipline Strategies	Children's Social Maladjustment
Ignores child misbehavior	-.03
Inductive reasoning	-.53*
Explains, Discusses	-.35*
Withdrawal of privileges, time-out	-.35*
Scolding, shaming, threatening	.33*
Spanking	.37*

* $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that individual differences in the parent-child relationship may reside less in the types of situations with which parents are confronted (although the frequency of occurrence of these situations varies considerably across families) and more in their ability to deal effectively with such situations.

The degree to which mothers find problematic situations challenging for them is associated not only with the level of coerciveness they use in dealing with these problematic situations but also with the frequency of occurrence of such situations. Mothers are more likely to use coercive discipline in frequently-occurring situations. The direction of the effects remains at issue.

The findings in this study show an interesting paradoxical effect when parents use coercive disciplinary strategies. Whereas parents' use of coercion in dealing with problematic parent-child situations is effective in stopping the child's behavior in most of the cited situations in the short-term, these situations were reported as more frequent in occurrence in the long-term.

Mothers' reports of the degree to which they find certain parent-child conflicts problematic for them is positively associated with teachers' reports of the degree to which certain peer and school situations are a problem for the child.

Maternal disciplinary practices in these situations are related to children's social competence in the school setting. Mothers' use of inductive reasoning, discussion and explanation, and the withdrawal of privileges is significantly negatively correlated with children's social maladjustment. On the other hand, mothers' use of coercive disciplinary strategies, such as scolding, shaming, threatening, and spanking, is significantly positively correlated with children's social maladjustment.

REFERENCES

Dodge, K. A., McClaskey, C. L., & Feldman, E. (1985). Situational approach to the assessment of social competence in children. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 53(3), 344-353.

Goldfried, M. R., & D'Zurilla, T. J. (1969). A behavioral-analytic model for assessing competence. In C. D. Spielberger (Ed.), Current topics in clinical and community psychology (Vol. 1, pp. 151-196). New York: Academic Press.

McFall, R. M. (1982). A review and reformulation of the concept of social skills. Behavioral Assessment, 4, 1-33. McFall, R. M., & Dodge, K. A. (1982). Self-management and interpersonal skills learning. In P. Karoly & F. H. Kanfer (Eds.), Self-management and behavior change: From theory to practice. New York: Pergamon Press